

VZCZCXRO2532
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHAK #0237/01 0431340
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 121340Z FEB 10
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2108
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 6953
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU PRIORITY
RUETIAA/NSACSS FT GEORGE G MEADE MD PRIORITY
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY
RHMFISS/MNF IRAQ C2 OPS PRIORITY
RUEUITH/AFOSI 52 FIS ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC//J-3/J-5// PRIORITY
RUEILB/NCTC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000237

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2020

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: AKP'S DEFLATED DREAMS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

REF: ANKARA 142

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The AKP seems have backed way from any immediate moves on constitutional reform. Its potential joint effort with MHP on calling for a referendum has collapsed. More AKP members also caution against holding a referendum prior to the general election, noting that the effort could backfire and weaken AKP's electoral support. PM Erdogan has openly questioned whether the party has the organizational discipline to produce enough votes in Parliament for a referendum. As a longer term goal, however, a new constitution remains a priority for AKP and is likely to be a key feature in their campaign efforts. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Recent events have revealed more cracks in the veneer of AKP unity regarding constitutional reform. On January 26, AKP Vice Chairman Huseyin Celik indicated to us that because support within the party for constitutional reform is uncertain, AKP would lobby other parties, particularly the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), about a possible shared constitutional reform agenda (REFTEL). On January 28, Devlet Bahceli, the MHP's President, announced that the MHP was willing to meet with the AKP to see if they shared any goals for reform, and to secure enough votes to pass amendments without having to resort to a referendum. However, that plan seemed to dissolve when a fracas erupted in parliament after a sharp exchange of words MHP deputy Osman Durmus (a former health minister) and AKP Health Minister Recep Akdag. Soon afterward, Bahceli discounted any prospect of MHP aligning itself with AKP's constitutional reform plans.

13. (SBU) Prime Minister Erdogan called an extraordinary meeting of AKP deputies on Monday, February 8. The gathering, we were told, was intended to allow AKP members to engage in an "open airing of ideas" with no set agenda. However, sources inside the meeting indicated later that the primary issue for discussion was constitutional reform. The low turnout at the meeting -- only 50 of AKP's 337 deputies attended -- led Erdogan to question his ability to unify the party behind such reforms. While some MPs may be traveling or running urgent errands, he said, their absence made the question of proposing a small constitutional reform package an impossibility. "If we are not fully sure about getting

330 votes we will not bring up the issue of a constitutional amendment," he concluded. (Note: There are 336 voting members of the AKP, and the minimum threshold for forcing a constitutional amendment to a public referendum is 330 votes in favor. The balloting is secret. Parliament is not in session on Mondays, which would have contributed to a low attendance rate in Erdogan's meeting February 8. End Note)

¶4. (SBU) Enroute to India earlier this week, President Gul commented to reporters that parliament had missed a key opportunity to prepare a new constitution. He noted that "political parties engaged in political struggle should not miss such opportunities."

¶5. (C) During the AKP meeting February 8, Constitutional Committee Chairman Ahmet Iyimaya proposed that any vote on a constitutional amendment -- usually a secret ballot -- should be an open vote, but his proposal did not gain traction. The same sources indicated that some deputies suggested the primary goal of constitutional reform should be reforming the "Supreme Judiciary", that is, the four highest courts: The Constitutional Court, the Court of Accounts (Sayistay), the Council of State (Danistay), and the Court of Appeals. (Note: AKP members have aired informal suggestions over the past year to either create a new court to handle half of the Constitutional Court's duties, or to increase its staff while simultaneously transferring the duty of appointing high court officials from the presidency to parliament. Such proposals are vehemently opposed by the opposition, which warns against allowing AKP to stack the courts. End note.) Other deputies

ANKARA 00000237 002 OF 002

urged that the constitution be amended primarily to prevent the closure of political parties.

¶6. (C) During a February 8 discussion with us, AKP Deputy and PM Advisor Saban Disli said AKP remains frustrated at the opposition's ability to draw out debate on minor legislative issues and, more importantly, to block any forward movement on constitutional reform. Disli said AKP is convinced that only a new constitution can address the core issues now facing modern Turkey, but that the opposition refuses to engage at any level on moving forward. Disli said AKP initially had hoped to seek a referendum this year on the constitutional issue but now questions not only whether it has the necessary votes (REFTEL) but also whether such a referendum could backfire and jeopardize AKP's electoral strength in the next general election.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: After an initial flurry of activity that seemed intent on launching a constitutional referendum, the AKP seems to have reassessed its position as too vulnerable for such a bold move in the near term. Still, AKP appears resolute on making a new constitution a centerpiece of its campaign in the election. Several AKP officials have told us that the party is conducting an intense internal debate on what kind of reforms to propose. Its extensive public polling efforts, a monthly exercise, are no doubt also probing the public on these questions.

Jeffrey

"Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at <http://www.intelink.sgov.gov/wiki/Portal:Turkey>"